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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the development of character education requirements in New Hampshire public school curricula and the education of teachers to be certified to teach character education. The research literature is reviewed and examples of programs for character development are described. Several observations provide helpful insights on the topics of citizenship and character education including: (1) character and citizenship education is not easy and schools must join in the humanizing process begun by parents in the home; (2) character and citizenship education is a partnership between the schools and the larger community; (3) character and citizenship education requires building community; (4) character and citizenship education should teach, not preach; and (5) character and citizenship education should inspire hope. (EH)

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Character and Citizenship Education:

Teaching Our Children To Be Human

by

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The decline of discipline in the public schools in the United States between the 1940's and the 1980's was graphically illustrated by this striking comparison made in a 1988 issue of Time magazine (1):

LEADING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS

1940's	1980's
Talking	Drug abuse
Chewing gum	Alcohol abuse
Making noise	Pregnancy
Running in the hallways	Suicide
Getting out of place in line	Rape
Wearing improper clothing	Robbery
Not putting paper in wastebaskets	Assault
	Burglary
	Arson
	Bombing

Today, eight years after the publication of these lists, we can point to all too few examples of success in combating these problems , and, in fact, in many schools across the nation the situation has dramatically worsened. It is not surprising, then, that many parents, educators, and members of the general public are looking to some type of character education in the public schools which might help to turn around a trend which threatens, not only the achievement of the purposes of education but also, the safety and well-being of students and teachers alike.

Movements to improve or restore character education in the nation's schools are not new, several having already occurred within this century. This moral dimension of education itself stems from a long-standing tradition in our nation's schools both public and private where it enjoyed wide support dating from the colonial period. The importance which John Dewey attached to character development, for example, was probably more often the rule than the exception among educators of former times.

In 1916 in Democracy and Education Dewey expressed the conviction that moral development has a rightful place in the school along with social and intellectual development. At that time Dewey stated, "It is a commonplace of educational theory that the establishing of character is a comprehensive aim of school instruction and discipline." (2)

While Dewey and other educators of earlier times may have taken this basic assumption as a commonplace and, therefore, as the starting point on which to build sound educational policy, the New Hampshire Board of Education arrived at what appears to be the same conclusion by a quite different route and only after years of being embroiled in the educational problems and dilemmas which characterize our contemporary culture. Somewhat before the publication of the two startlingly different lists with which this presentation began, the Board, in its process of wrestling with compelling educational issues such as financing, teacher competency, school dropout rates and declining student achievement, had arrived at the conclusion that the root cause of many educational problems lay deeper than the issues confronting the Board on a regular basis. In the words of Judith O. Thayer, then Chair of the New Hampshire Board of Education:

> "The Board believed that our schools were increasingly being populated by many students who, through their behavior, were communicating a lack of purpose or meaning in their lives. Poor student achievement was merely a result of this malaise that had infected our culture. It was accompanied by rising statistics documenting teenage drug and alcohol abuse, adolescent suicide, juvenile crime, illegitimate pregnancies, and the on-slaught of AIDS." (3)

Once articulated these ideas generated considerable debate. This exchange, in turn, led to further research and discussion including a study of the New Hampshire tradition as delineated in the New Hampshire State Constitution, other documents and

statutes--a route which ultimately led to the Board's decision to redefine the purpose of education in the State of New Hampshire as encompassing two goals. The first and most obvious of these goals was, of course, that of preparing children academically. It was in the articulation of the second goal, that of preparing children ethically as well, that the Board saw the potential for an education which would develop the whole person and by so doing enhance the achievement of all of the goals which history and contemporary experience indicated were necessary for responsible citizenship in our democracy.

It seems clear that the Board saw in what came to be called the Character and Citizenship Initiative, not a new direction historically speaking, but the restoration of an old tradition which seemed to have been lost sight of in greater or lesser degree. It is not surprising that the gradual erosion of the tradition and practice of character education in the public schools should occur simultaneously with the weakening of the child's early moral education which began with the family and which, by and large, had formerly been affirmed and supported by the community. The schools, after all, are a part of society and as such are subject to many of the same stresses and strains that the family, community and nation might have as a result of the interplay of massive forces beyond their control. The interaction of these diverse influences tends to be too complex to isolate specific cause and effect relationships, but one need only examine some of the major movements of the past century to see that their effects upon society and its institutions have been sweeping and all-pervasive.

The predominant motif of the entire century has been that of rapid change on almost every front. Thomas Likona identifies several philosophical movements which contributed to changes in the way we view our world and which subsequently influenced or accompanied changes in almost every aspect of life. (4) The ideas launched by Darwin's Theory of Evolution set the tone for a new world view and gave rise to the tendency for people to see everything, including moral values, as being in constant flux.

The philosophy of logical positivism with its radical distinction between facts (which can be proved scientifically) as opposed to values (which positivism held were only expressions of feeling and not objectively true) led to a relativistic and private interpretation of morality placing it on the level of personal value judgment rather than a legitimate subject which the public schools should transmit to the young. In addition, radical economic changes due to shifts in business and industry, increasing urbanization, advances in science and medicine, and the advent of a technology which has revolutionized transportation, communication and the processing of information have all proceeded so rapidly that there has been little if any opportunity to evaluate and integrate the changes they represent into the daily fabric of peoples' lives. Demographic changes have resulted in increasing cultural diversity and contemporary life styles have precipitated lasting changes in the traditional nuclear family model where the father was the sole provider and the mother stayed home and cared for the family.

It was in this climate of phenomenal change with its subsequent confusion and at times outright rejection of traditional values that many people turned for help almost instinctively to education and the school system. Justifiably or not, there were also some people who turned to the school system not primarily to seek help but to assess blame. Schools themselves were struggling with the effects of radical change, one of these changes being a change in perception on the part of many people that the moral education of children was not the obligation of the schools. As Kevin Walsh describes the situation, "In contemporary education establishing character in the young is not only ignored but for many considered to be not even in the purview of the school. Consequently, the problems in both society and the school with the young have steadily increased to the point of crisis." (5)

Setting aside the controversial issues surrounding causes and the extent of the problem and looking once more at the solution being proposed by the New Hampshire

State Board of Education, their mandate to return to character and citizenship education was not met with universal approval. Heralded by many as a long-needed step in the right direction, the movement was viewed with concern by others. The question probably posed most often was, "Whose values will be taught?" Some people feared that the answer to this question might precipitate a compromise with the principle of separation of church and state and could open the door to religious indoctrination. This, of course, was not at all what the Board had in mind. One need not look to religious doctrine to find the fundamental values and behaviors that define humanity at its best. The study of ethics is, in fact, often pursued as a branch of philosophy which deals with judgment, duty and social conduct. Professional organizations which have no connection to any religion or religious group consider it a right and duty to provide codes of ethics to give direction to the responsible practice of their members. It seems clear that there are some values so basic to human living that they derive their legitimacy from something deep within the human person and not from being espoused by organized religion. While these fundamental values are often included in the moral codes found in the great religions of the world, they are not dependent upon religious belief for validation but rather express the aspirations of the human spirit at its best.

It was then, these basic human values that the Board struggled to articulate, values which are espoused by many but are the exclusive property of none, values which can claim a certain universality in that they are not merely subjective in nature but have objective worth which flows from the fact that they affirm human dignity. They promote the good of the individual but at the same time also promote the common good. They "meet the classical ethical tests of reversibility. (Would you want to be treated this way?) and universalizability (Would you want all persons to act this way in a similar situation?)"

(6) These human values make up the infra-structure, so to speak, which makes possible the mutual exercise of rights and responsibilities necessary to make democratic government work and to perpetuate its existence for succeeding generations. Seen in this light, the mandating of citizenship and character education in the public schools was both a logical and necessary step and posed no threat of unconstitutionality.

In November of 1988, the New Hampshire Board of Education culminated its study and discussion by issuing its Policy on Character and Citizenship Education. In it the Board pledged itself to assist the local districts in programs which would promote basic values of character and citizenship which they further articulated by the following list:

Self discipline/ Self respect/Self control;
Truth/Honesty with self and others;
Fairness/Integrity/Justice;
Respect/Courtesy/Human worth;
Responsibility to oneself and others;
Community Service/Responsible
Citizenship (7)

The Board launched the implementation of its policy by holding, with the assistance of Boston University's Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, a series of public forums on the history and function of character and citizenship education in the United States. These forums were soon followed by academies for teachers and administrators which provided them with the necessary instruction to begin to integrate character and citizenship education into the existing curriculum by means of classical and contemporary literature, history and the Founding Documents.

The Teachers' Academies were founded on a model that included the following assumptions:

a. Teachers are professionals.

b. Opportunities for character and citizenship education are found in almost daily "teachable moments", in both the regular curriculum and in the human and social events that form the whole environment of our schools.

c. Teachers are "role models" to students in what they are and what they do.

d. A critical study and sharing of the humanities, current literature and the Founding Documents of our Nation both empower and enable teachers to explore with students those traits of good character and responsible citizenship which we hold in common as a democratic society.

e. Schools of character enhance the school as an environment for learning.

f. Character and citizenship education is a preventive measure to human and social concerns which too often inhibit the mission of schools and education. (8)

The Character and Citizenship Initiative had been given a philosophical direction by means of its historical rootedness in State documents and early policy and practice and had been successfully launched by means of forums, academies and other support efforts that would continue to be made available to schools.. There still remained three important pieces needed to insure that implementation could go forward. Interestingly enough, none of these pieces related specifically to a required and state approved curriculum to be adopted by the public schools in New Hampshire. The principle of local control, which has traditionally kept State influence on the day-to-day operation of the schools at a minimum, would preclude requiring such a "one-size-fits-all" curriculum. The Board did, however, take steps to insure that each school come to grips with the issue of character

and citizenship education and include it in the curriculum as local needs, preferred methodology, and available resources dictated. This was accomplished by including requirements for character and citizenship education in the minimum standards for public school approval by the State. Two additional pieces were added to provide the appropriate preparation teachers would need to succeed in their efforts to teach character and citizenship. Thus, the standards for approved graduate and undergraduate programs for pre-service teacher education were amended to include preparation in character and citizenship education and a provision was added to the requirements for recertification of teachers which designated that at least five clock hours be devoted to character and citizenship education.

Now, more than seven years later, the burning question is, of course, is character education effective? While this is undoubtedly the most burning question and one that confronted every past character education movement of this century, we can still find only partial answers in our examination of research on programs of the past and those currently in use. Unfortunately, evidence from research is limited in several important way:

1. Studies which utilize the reputable research techniques are limited.
2. Programs which have been the subject of study are primarily at the K-8 level.
3. Several promising strategies have never been adequately studied. (9)

First, to speak to the limitations of generalizable research: Practitioners, both administrators and teachers, who may have produced effective programs are not usually heavily invested in the methodology of research. They are often too taken up with the very real demands of doing character and citizenship education to spend the necessary time to develop sound research design, safeguards against bias, and carefully documented objective evaluations. On a practical level, nonprogram control groups, especially in

smaller schools, are difficult to set up and even more difficult to justify to parents whose support for the program may have been hard-won in the first place. All of these things also take time and money which are always in short supply in any school system. As a result of this situation, there can and probably do exist any number of character and citizenship programs across the state and nation which teachers, administrators and parents feel have made a difference but this conclusion is based only on testimonials and other informal data and not on objective, generalizable information.

A case in point is the commercially marketed program produced by the Jefferson Center for Character Education. This program follows a model of language, concept, and practice. That is, it begins by first teaching the language of values; it then moves through understanding of the concepts; and finally, using examples from the students' experiences and reinforcement from the school environment, it culminates in assisting children to practice the appropriate behavior. Beginning in the fall of the 1990 school term, thirty-one elementary and middle schools in Los Angeles, California, adopted this program. When administrators were interviewed by telephone in the fall of 1990 and again in the spring of 1991, twenty elementary and five middle school administrators stated that all forms of reported discipline problems had decreased, student morale had increased, parents were more involved in the school, and students were acting more responsibly. (10) While this study is very impressive, its relies on informal rather than hard data.

By contrast The Weber County Character Education Project based in Utah is a rather notable exception to the rule in that it goes beyond testimonials to support its claim of effectiveness. This program, involving 3,000 students and 109 teachers, is based on a 5-step teaching model. Focussing on a specific principle, teachers attempt to 1) stimulate interest, 2) model the principle, 3) integrate it with what is already known, 4) involve parents with homework, and finally, 5) extend the principle into real-life situations. Over a

two-year period, teachers in the program classrooms reported that problem behaviors were reduced a statistically significant 250% while problem behaviors in the nonprogram groups increased. (11)

The second major limitation with existing research lies in the lack of data on programs for adolescents, the very age when problem behavior is more likely to escalate. Most of the programs seem to have been limited to elementary schools, and such research as is available on programs for the older age groups often show mixed results with program effects not generally persisting over time. (12)

Finally, there are lacunae in research on areas of intense interest such as that of using literature to inspire and promote character development--a strategy which has held sustained interest for character educators for many years. While perennially popular and amenable to incorporation into already existing programs such as humanities and Great Books Programs, such programs have gone largely unassessed. (13)

Granting the existence of these limitations, I would , nevertheless, offer several observations supported by common sense and/or based on research that could provide helpful insights on the topic of citizenship and character education.

1. Character and citizenship education is not easy.

It has not been so in the past, is not now and in all likelihood never will be easy. The light-hearted bumper sticker that invites the reader to "Perform random acts of kindness" notwithstanding, the actual teaching of children to be consistently kind is not itself a random act. Amitai Etzioni rather colorfully points out:

> Our culture watches newborn children through rosy-tinted lenses; They are widely held to be 'so cute.' If one looks at them more objectively, one notes that they are rather like other animals: They

> intake food, expel waste, and shriek. Above all, they show no signs of inborn commitments to moral or social values, and do not develop virtues on their own. (14)

And we all know that at the time when schools join in this humanizing process begun by parents in the home, the job is not only far from complete, but is more likely to be gearing up to present its most exacting challenges. As children progress through childhood and adolescence we hope we have helped them with the knowledge, attitudes and habits which will make them responsible and caring adults, but the proof of our success often lies in a future which we are not privileged to observe.

2. Character and citizenship education is a partnership.

Character and citizenship education should not be understood to be the so-called property of the school nor should it be undertaken as such.. According to the African proverb, "It takes an entire village to raise a child." An effective program must involve a partnership among educators, parents, and the larger community. The support systems which each of these entities represents are a necessary ingredient for causing a stable, consistent, and lasting effect on children.

The logistics alone of organizing and communicating with all partners presents a formidable task. Additionally, there may and probably will be honest disagreements among these partners that only patient dialogue has a chance of resolving. The joint efforts of participating partners can, however, make it possible to accomplish goals which the school alone cannot reach.

The first of these partners, the parents, have the most at stake and consequently provide the most logical, essential and enduring participation in a character and citizenship program. Schools, especially in recent years, have already become more sensitive to the importance of the role of parents in the educational enterprise and have come to appreciate

their involvement in the operation of the school as necessary and beneficial. This involvement is not less but more important in character and citizenship education, but there are other helpful partners as well.

In enlisting the aid of the larger community, the potential role of corporations, religious groups, benevolent and professional organizations, and government should not be underestimated. All of these segments of society have a vested interest in preparing our children to be upright and contributing members of both community and nation and can in their own way provide appropriate support for the school's efforts. If a program for adolescents, for example, includes some type of community service, as many now do, the various agencies in the our community that may be seeking volunteers, become a necessary adjunct to the program. Nearby colleges and universities may be able to support the character and citizenship goals of local elementary, middle, and secondary schools while at the same time meeting the goals they themselves have for the moral development of young college-age adults. For example, college students who are part of a campus volunteer program, some even perhaps preparing for careers in education, psychology or social work, can participate by helping to teach conflict resolution strategies to school children, or serve as role models in Big Brother/Big Sister programs or after-school homework programs.

For resources and materials on how to do character and citizenship education schools can now look to foundations and networks created precisely for this purpose. One example is the Character and Education Network begun in 1991 as a means of access to current and hallmark research in the field of character and moral development. It is supported by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Boston University's Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, and individual network members.

At the national level, Federal legislation under the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 awarded grants to partnerships of state and local educational agencies for developing and implementing character education plans. While New Hampshire, along with other states, has long viewed the taking of government money with suspicion because of its historical connection with government control, some see maintaining local autonomy not only as desirable but also possible. It is the opinion of Judd Gregg, former governor and now senator from New Hampshire, that neither state or federal government should be allowed to jeopardize local control. In his words, "Each school District should be given the flexibility to develop and refine a plan for character and citizenship education which reflects its own community without loss of local initiative and control." (15)

3 Character and citizenship education requires building community.

If character and citizenship education is to be effective it must be supported by and grow out of a closely knit social structure which is actively fostered within the school Although good character is rooted in personal integrity and supported by a healthy and realistic self-respect, it is most generally manifested along a horizontal dimension which is social in nature and characterized by respect for others and a commitment to responsible behavior in the school and wider community.

This communal aspect of character and citizenship education is relevant on several levels. The first of these is use of strategies based on an understanding of dynamics operating within the community group. Reason as well as research would suggest that teachers make use of what we already know about group influence in both its negative and positive aspects, the strengths of peer-centered teaching approaches and leadership training.

The second, and perhaps more important dimension of community, is that of providing the milieu, or laboratory, if you will, in which habits of character are taught, applied, practiced and nurtured. In order to be this community, schools must examine

how students are treated, what kinds of expectations in terms of both academic and character development are being used to challenge them, how, as they grow and mature, they are given increasing opportunities to exercise responsible citizenship. Modeling by teachers, administrators and staff is a necessary ingredient and lends authenticity to what might otherwise be seen by students as mere lip service to an ideal that nobody really takes seriously. Another important ingredient of the community experience is that of support by means of recognition of achievement and effort. "Character develops within a social web or environment. The nature of the environment, the messages it sends to individuals, and the behaviors it encourages and discourages are important factors to consider in character education. Clear rules of conduct, student ownership of those rules, a supportive environment and satisfaction resulting from complying with the norms of the environment shape behavior." (16)

4. Character and citizenship education should teach, not preach.

A purely didactic approach separated from application and practice has probably never worked very well in any educational endeavor, and contemporary research confirms what good teachers have always known, namely that merely knowing how one should act cannot be expected to have a significant and lasting effect on character development.

To risk stating what may seem to be the obvious, if we are to indeed teach and not preach, we need to utilize what we already know about teaching and the learner. To date we are still in the process of understanding and coming to grips with the impact on learning of mass media and the information highway, but we have already discovered much about their use and about many effective teaching strategies. Cooperative learning, for example, in use for over ten years, has resulted in increased academic achievement. What perhaps may be overlooked is the fact that reviews of the extensive literature on this topic have

shown that cooperative learning has also resulted in students learning to get along better with students racially and ethnically different from themselves. As a result of cooperative learning, students also become more accepting of mainstreamed students, show greater mutual concern for one another, and engage more frequently in prosocial behavior. (17)

Good teaching practice must also include understanding how children differ one from another in how they learn best. Teachers know from their own experience and from research evidence as well that engaging students in a purely cognitive pursuit of knowledge is not the best approach for many students. We cannot ignore the fact that for this generation, in addition to the rational , there seems to be a particularly strong dependence upon intuition, emotion and experience as powerful modes of knowing. (18) If an understanding of these differences in learning style preferences and a corresponding adaptation to them can enhance the teaching of academic subjects, it is highly probable that this is also true of character and citizenship education.

5. And lastly, character and citizenship education should inspire hope.

Some of the most alarming statistics of our time document the frequency of child and teen suicide. The hopelessness that triggers suicide and other less drastic self-destructive behavior has a fear counterpart which we find in even very young children -- fear of nuclear destruction, fear of being kidnapped, fear of Aids, fear that preceding generations will have already trashed the only world we have by the time they grow up. By the time they start school many children have already experienced hard things in their lives and as they get older they become increasingly sensitive to the ways in which the vast problems of society may touch them personally. Charles Hagen attempts to understand this phenomenon, especially as it occurs in adolescents, by looking to the very different experiences of the so called Generation X--the unknown quantity. For many children, he states, the only constant they have known is the constant experience of change.

While manifested in a variety of ways, the overall effect seems most often to be a feeling of disconnectedness especially common to the older adolescent and the young adult. "This disconnectedness coupled with an uncertain job market and general economic uncertainty has produced a generation often pessimistic about its own chances. . .Those who attempt to impart a sense of moral responsibility will need to be aware of the destructive power of hopelessness and the potential obstacle it may be to learning.. . .Transmitting values to this generation will require persuading its members 'that there is a future for them in the 21st century.'" (19) The overwhelmingly positive reception given by young people to what are termed "motivational speakers"--people who in spite of incredible hardships have become happy, productive and worthwhile human beings-- attests to a very real hunger for hope. Young people need to know that they, their nation and their world can become better and that their efforts make a difference.

In closing, I would like to leave you with the thoughts of one school principal as expressed in a letter to all of the teachers on the first day of school. Imagine, if you will, that you, a recently hired teacher, find the following message from your principal delivered to your desk on the opening day of classes:

> Dear Teacher:
>
> I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers; children poisoned by educated physicians; infants killed by trained nurses; women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So I am suspicious of education.
>
> My request is: help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human. (20

End Notes

1. From a study conducted by the Fullerton, CA, Police Department and the California Department of Education and included in "Getting Tough," by Ezra Bowen, Time, Feb. 1, 1988, Vol.131, #5, p. 52-58.

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17. Ibid, p. 66.

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20. Haim Ginott, as quoted by Howard A Radest, Can We Teach Ethics?. (Westport, Connecticut: 1989), p. 41.